

REVIEWS OF RECENT BOOKS.

Roper, A. G. *Ancient Eugenics: The Arnold Prize Essay for 1913.* Oxford. B. H. Blackwell; 1913; price 2s. 6d.; pp. 76.

It always deserves to be recorded with gratitude when the University of Oxford takes note of any modern problems, and for this reason alone Mr. Roper's book would deserve a welcome, even if it should turn out that he has been able to add little of moment to the chapter on ancient eugenics in Dr. E. H. J. Schuster's excellent little book on "Eugenics." For if the results of researches into ancient eugenics prove to be mainly negative, the modern eugenist can at least start afresh on scientific lines, unhampered by any overwhelming weight of tradition, after a respectful salute to Plato's prophetic soul. Now, if Mr. Roper can be trusted, such actually proves to be the case. He has constantly to claim eugenical significance for institutions whose origin was probably very remote from conscious eugenics and for opinions into which he reads far more than they probably meant, and to eke out the scantiness of the historical material by frequent philosophizing, which suggests that he is a philosopher rather than a historian. But the truth is that the historical evidence is hopelessly inadequate, and that Mr. Roper has been set the task of making bricks out of straws. He naturally makes the most of the Spartan practices of exposing sickly and deformed, and not looking too closely into the parentage of healthy children, etc. But he does not attempt to prove that these practices were consciously eugenical in their intention or the real reason of the superior physique of the Spartan ruling class, and it is far more probable that they were relics of barbarism, like the rest of the institutions of the rude invading warriors who impressed the Greek imagination so far above their deserts. If so, they should, like the killing of the aged and diseased in many savage tribes, be conceived as incidents rather of natural selection than of eugenics. Nor does it appear that biologically the system was a success. Whether from excessive warfare or from excessive in-breeding, or from economic reasons, or from other causes we can hardly guess at, the Spartiate population never became adequate to secure the position which Spartan bravery had won. So far from increasing under the (alleged) eugenical solicitude of the State, it progressively diminished from a (traditional) 10,000 to less than a thousand, and this although in practice the elimination even of the physically unfit does not appear to have been at all rigorous. Mr. Roper should have remembered the case of Agesilaus, whose congenital lameness did not prevent either his survival or even his succession to the kingship in preference to Leotychides, whose legitimacy was disputed. And this in spite of an oracle warning the Spartans against a "lame" reign. If the story be held to prove at any rate the existence of a prejudice against a physical defect in a ruler, like the objections of the Cyrenaens to a lame Battiad and of the Bacchiads to marrying Labda, which are recorded by Herodotus (whom curiously enough Mr. Roper nowhere cites), it shows at any rate that such defects were not necessarily fatal to the individuals afflicted with them.

Far more important for the student of eugenics than the crudities of Sparta would be a knowledge of the social and biological conditions that attended the two great ages of Hellenic colonization, before the sixth century B.C., and after Alexander's conquest of the East. For these represent the biological *floruit* of the Greek stock. Unfortunately, however, history is almost completely silent on these eras, or at any rate does not enable us to understand how the result was achieved. In the case of the earlier period of colonization, we know only the cities which founded the colonies, but it is clear that they by no means always provided the mass of the colonists. In the case of the later period his-

torians have been completely absorbed in the struggles of kings and left us to rely on fragmentary archæological material for glimpses of the human flood of settlers that hellenized the East in the wake of Alexander's army. Under the circumstances it is no wonder that the scientific study of the eugenics of a single tribe of modern savages, like the Masai or the Zulus, should promise more enlightenment than the whole of ancient history. Such is the imperfection of the historic record.

The one great figure in ancient eugenics is really Plato, who alone can be said to have perceived the spiritual significance and potentialities of the crude methods of social selection which were practised in the Greek world. But Mr. Roper does not bring out his unique position. He succumbs instead to the Oxford convention that it is *de rigueur* to make out that Aristotle has said the last word on every subject of human interest, and even commits himself to the astounding statement that "the *Politics* not only set the final seal upon political science in Greece, it also marks the last word in eugenics" (p. 69). Even if we charitably supply what Mr. Roper may perhaps have meant, viz., "ancient" before "eugenics," the remark is not far short of absurd. For Aristotle shows no sign anywhere of appreciating the suggestiveness of the great work of the creative imagination which we know as the *Republic* of Plato. His own suggestions about infanticide, abortion, slavery, the rearing and education of children, etc., do not rise above the common-places any self-satisfied conservative professor might cull from the practice of the period. The fixing of the age of marriage at 37 for all men and at 18 for all women would appear to be a delicious auto-biographical universalization of his own marriage to Pythias, but it seems ludicrous to dignify his prejudiced platitudes with the title of a scheme of eugenics, and to ascribe its limitations to scientific caution, rather than to lack of imagination.

Mr. Roper's account of Plato's speculations also is open to exception in some respects. He ascribes to Plato's Utopia the extraordinary institution that in it all the offspring of the working classes were to be systematically put to death, and naturally infers that these classes would soon "have suffered total extinction" (p. 44). Plato has absurdities enough to answer for—such as the first step towards the realization of his ideal, viz., the total expulsion of all the adults from the future ideal city by order of a tyrant converted to philosophy—but this insanity has been manufactured for him by Mr. Roper, who has not observed that the passage in 460 C., to which apparently he refers, is not concerned with the births in the lower classes at all, but with the problem of inferior offspring in the "guardian" class. He evidently has not grasped that Plato's proposals for communism, abolition of the family and eugenics, were all intended to apply only to the upper classes, as Aristotle's censure of these proposals in the *Politics*, 1262 B. confirms. Altogether it cannot be said that Mr. Roper has exhausted his subject.

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Douglas, A. R. *Some Suggestions Respecting the Care of the Feeble-Minded under the Mental Deficiency Bill*, 1913. London. Adlard; 1913; pp. 6. (Reprinted from the *Journal of Mental Science*, July, 1913.)

THE Bill to which this article refers became an Act shortly after it was written, but what is said of the Bill is equally applicable to the Act, as such changes as were made in the later stages were not of a fundamental character, nor do they for the most part affect the arguments here presented.

The article sets out the views of the writer as to the general lines on which the provision of institutional care under the Act can but be organised and co-ordinated in the widest and most general aspect of the matter.